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ABSTRACT

This paper suggests that videocassettes and videodiscs of commercial films provide a hitherto untapped resource for the application of principles and practices previously in the domain of bibliotherapy. Although students may balk at the idea of spending many hours reading through even the most engaging of popular fiction, the paper argues that they often display no such qualms about spending an hour and a half watching a film adaptation of the same story. The net result is that issues, ideas, and situations that would have formed the basis for bibliotherapy may now be processed within the context of videotherapy, with the therapist facilitating insight and therapeutic progress through discussion of popular films. Examples and techniques are provided and discussed. (MKA)

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ABSTRACT

Videotherapy: Variations Upon Therapeutic Themes

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Bibliotherapy has, for many years, been regarded to be a valuable therapeutic tool and has been practiced in numerous variations in many clinical and academic milieus. However, there has been much concern in recent years about the apparent decline in quantity and quality of time spent in reading, due to competition from an ever-broadening spectrum of indoor activities that vie for children's time (i.e., network and cable television, video games, videocassettes and the many wonders of the Internet.)

It is the thesis of this paper that videocassettes and videodiscs of commercial films provide a hitherto untapped resource for the application of principles and practices previously in the domain of bibliotherapy. Although students may balk at the idea of spending many hours reading through even the most engaging of popular fiction, this practitioner has discovered that they often display no such qualms about spending an hour and a half watching a film adaptation of the same story. The net result is that issues, ideas, and situations which would have formed the basis for bibliotherapy may now be processed within the context of " videotherapy," with the therapist facilitating insight and therapeutic progress through discussion of popular films. Examples and techniques for implementation will be provided and discussed.

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Videotherapy: Variations Upon Therapeutic Themes

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A presentation made at the NASP 2000 Conference

Bibliotherapy (defined as "guided reading that helps individuals to gain understanding of the self and environment, learn from others, or find solutions to problems" [Shrank and Engels, 1981]) has for many years been considered to be a valuable therapeutic tool, and has been practiced in numerous variations in many clinical and academic milieus, including school psychology (Dreyer, 1995) However, in recent years researchers have noted an unfortunate decline in the quantity and quality of time spent in reading (Salomon, 1984; Reinking & Wu, 1990; Beentjes & van der Voort, 1991). During the past twenty years or so, especially, young people have been faced with an ever broadening spectrum of indoor activities that vie for their time. Besides the ever-present network and local television programming, there is now "competition" from cable television, video games, videocassettes, and the many wonders of the Internet.. As any high school English teacher knows, it now takes special effort to get students to consider reading to be a worthwhile leisuretime activity.

Anyone who works closely with children knows that they enjoy watching motion pictures, both in theaters and on video, and that they often enjoy talking about what they have seen. By helping them to select, and by speaking with them about, given popular films it is often possible to use these films as a springboard for discussion and

insight. Although a student may balk at the idea of spending many hours reading through even the most engaging of popular fiction, this practitioner has discovered that the same child may display no such qualms about spending an hour and a half watching a film adaptation of the same story. And the net result is that the same issues, ideas and situations which would have formed the basis for bibliotherapy may now be discussed and processed within the process of "videotherapy," with the psychologist guiding the student through discussions of how protagonists thought and acted, and facilitating therapeutic insights and awarenesses.

Though such videotherapy can be introduced through the more formal process of assigning or loaning a child a given film (as is usually done in bibliotherapy), it is just as easy to engage the child in discussion of a film he or she has recently seen, if one is familiar with the film and can associate or interpolate issues which are pertinent.

An excellent example can be found in the recent remake of the classic Disney film, **The Parent Trap**. This updating of the popular 1961 Hayley Mills fantasy involves two twin sisters, separated at birth and raised by the individual parents with no knowledge of each other, who meet and plot to get their parents to remarry. Though a simple and engaging film on the surface, it can also be a source of discussion of such issues as parental divorce (or fears thereof), abandonment, separation, sisterhood, and (most pertinently for children of divorce) parental reconciliation fantasies. By discussing the feelings and actions of the children in the film, one provides a safe forum for talking about a child's own issues and thoughts regarding these issues.

Videotherapy can be used in combination with other therapeutic and diagnostic techniques, as is bibliotherapy. It lends itself strongly to the use of metaphor.

For example, a twelve-year-old boy, newly arrived in the area and feeling abandoned because his elder brother (formerly his closest friend) had recently begun taking drugs and hanging out with a negative peer group, was loaned a copy of the 1984 movie **The Lost Boys**. In the film, a boy deals with the fact that his older brother had been bitten by a vampire and was being pulled into a vampire culture. By discussing how the young boy in the film felt, it was possible to deal with the student's feelings about his brother, drugs, loneliness, loss, and what friendship means and entails.

Among many other examples of films which can be used to establish therapeutic metaphors or encourage discussion through videotherapy are:

Bullying	-	**My Bodyguard**
Divorce/Father Issues	-	**Mrs. Doubtfire**
Loss/Guilt	-	**Ordinary People**
Letting Go	-	**Born Free**
Being Different	-	**Planet of the Apes**
Friendship/Loss	-	**Charlotte's Web**, etc., etc., etc.

Another therapeutic use of video technology is through the focusing and/or redirecting of a student's attention to specific ideas or statements made in a film. For example, one may call attention to such salient ideas as "The Force is with you," in the **Star Wars** films, or establish an anticipatory set for what the Wizard in **The Wizard of Oz** tells the Tin Man about how a heart is judged, for a child who needs to hear this message. ("The heart is not judged by how much you love, but by how much you are loved by others.") However used, videotherapy provides a medium through which well-

established principles and concepts can positively influence a generation that is focused on the screen.

References

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